

Report Number 7 from the Peace Section
Task Force on Women in Church and Society
September - December, 1974

PERSPECTIVES ON 1974

From the Task Force

The Task Force on Women in Church and Society reported at the MCC Peace Section November meeting on their 1974 activities. As part of the report, the Task Force presented their study on women and work (see the summer issue). The Peace Section passed a resolution urging MCC to review employment practices and policies as they relate to women. It is anticipated that this issue will be discussed at the MCC Executive and annual meetings.

Besides efforts along the lines of employment practices, a year-end record of the Task Force's projects would include:

PERSONS BECOMING: One thousand copies have been distributed (1st printing, May; 2nd, August). Plans are now being made for a third printing.

SEMINAR ON THE FAMILY: Over fifty women from the U.S. and Canada attended the May 7-8 seminar planned by the Task Force and the Peace Section Washington Office.

REPORTS: Around 400 individuals received copies of the Task Force Report. The Report will continue to be issued four times a year.

LETTER TO COLLEGES: The Task Force sent a letter to Mennonite College deans and the heads of the sociology and religion departments. The letter encouraged colleges to promote studies on the involvement and inclusion of women in church and society.

CANADIAN-U.S. DIALOGUE: The Task Force remains in dialogue with Canadian women on the possibility of a transnational, joint effort. This subject will be pursued at the MCC (Canada) meeting in January.

CURRICULUM: The Task Force suggested to members of the Anabaptist Curriculum Project that guidelines for writers be established that would encourage (1) the expansion of role models in stories and pictures, (2) the adoption of more inclusive language, and (3) the incorporation of more accounts of female Biblical characters.

What priorities would you like to see the Task Force set for 1975? Can you think of ways in which we might tie in with International Women's Year?

From the Churches

The concern for women's status in the church is being felt to some extent in all denominations. In June the Program Unit on Education and Renewal of the World Council of Churches sponsored a Consultation on Sexism in the 1970's. The Consultation, held in Berlin, brought together 154 women from 49 countries to discuss discrimination against women in different areas of life.

On the U.S. scene, the event which received the most publicity this year was the ordination of eleven women as priests in the Episcopal Church. The ordination was later declared unauthorized and invalid in a 120 to 9 ruling by the House of Bishops. Dr. Charles V. Willie, vice president of the church's House of Deputies, denounced the decision as "an exercise of male arrogance of the most blatant kind. If you think they

are unlearned, we can send them to seminary. If you think they are not holy, we can teach them how to pray. But if you dismiss them from the priesthood simply because they are female, they can do nothing, because Almighty God made them that way."

No event in Mennonite churches begins to compare with the Philadelphia ordination service. However, the sample listing of a few activities and developments may indicate some "stirrings" and signs of direction.

- First Mennonite Church, Indianapolis: class on singleness and a nine-week course on Women in the Church;
- Hively Mennonite Church, Elkhart: one-month study on marriage and singleness;
- Akron Mennonite Church (Pa.), Benton Mennonite Church (Ind.), Goshen College: classes on human sexuality
- Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries, Elkhart: 35% of the student body is female; a course on Women in Church and Society will be offered second semester.

Needless to say, we continue to experience frustration. For example, three of the six names appearing on the ballot for election to the General Board of the General Conference Mennonite Church were names of women. Three persons were elected - all male.

From the Conferences

General Conference: (1) On February 7, the Commission on Education voted to employ a half-time person to work in the area of education on "The Role of Women and Men in the Church," initially for a period of two years. Herta Funk accepted this assignment and began work in September. (2) As a result of the 1973 Consultation on Women, a woman is now represented on each of the GC commissions. (3) Dr. David Schroeder, a Mennonite scholar in New Testament studies, gave a series of talks on a Biblical understanding of women's liberation at the conference in St. Catharines.

Mennonite Church: The Mennonite Board of Congregational Ministries, in cooperation with the Women's Missionary and Service Commission, prepared a study document on Women in the Church for use in congregations. The study is divided into three basic sections: an examination of Biblical passages, a survey of the present status of women in church and society, and a discussion on ways of working toward congregational consensus.

From the Press

More and more books are being published each year on women and the church. Some recent publications that are receiving a considerable degree of attention include:

Daly, Mary, Beyond God the Father, Beacon Press, Boston.

Reuther, Rosemary, Religion and Sexism, Touchstone Paperbacks, 1974, \$3.00.

Russell, Letty, Human Liberation in a Feminist Perspective-A Theology, Westminster Press, \$3.95.

Scanzoni, Letha and Nancy Hardesty, All We're Meant to Be: A Biblical Approach to Women's Liberation, Waco, TX: Word Books, 1974, \$6.95.

The Woman's Bible, Coalition Task Force on Women and Religion (4759C 15th St. N.E., Seattle, Washington 98105), \$6.45. Thirteen women in the mid-1890's scrutinized every Biblical passage that referred to women. The book is now in paperback form.

John Nyce, Goshen, reviews the Scanzoni and Hardesty book, All We're Meant to Be:

This is an unusual book among other attempts for a Christian statement on women's liberation. Few stereotypes can fit it -- written and published by "evangelicals," the book strongly affirms the equality of men and women in the church; authorized jointly by a single and a married woman, it is neither marriage nor singles oriented; subtitled "a Biblical Approach," the book deals honestly with difficult biblical material better than many "biblical" approaches to the issue.

Scanzoni and Hardesty have tried to communicate with the average church woman who has heard and believed many cliches about "woman's role" in the church, home, and society. They directly address both scriptural passages (I Cor. 11, Eph. 5, I Tim. 2) and terminology (headship, obedience, submission) which are often used by church men to perpetuate "woman's role." Through balanced interpretation (newly defined in chapter 2) they provide convincing help toward a freeing use of such scriptures. Without doubt these women are convinced that God created interdependent persons (female and male); they have written a book that should help other women and men to advocate the same view.

The latter part of the book deals sociologically with the current status of women and the circumstances encountered by persons reaching toward "all we're meant to be." Continued respect for scripture and God's intention in creation produces helpful advice on realities of social change. A chapter on "The Single Woman" is candid about the single adult's place in church and society in a refreshingly helpful manner.

The book is reasonably well researched and fully documented, but lacks a bibliography. Weaknesses are apparent in material about Jesus and women (Leonard Swidler, "Jesus was a Feminist" treats this more effectively). I Cor. 11 is perhaps treated too narrowly, by limiting it to veiling of women; sources used here are neither balanced nor representative.

As a male/husband/father with some sense of interdependence, I felt that insufficient stress was made on the need for male responsibility in changing "woman's role". Often (in the book) the woman's liberation seems possible in spite of the man's non-participation in interdependence. Since the book is intended primarily for women, this is a bit more understandable but less that desireable. In spite of an early assertion that God is not male, could not use of the male pronoun for God have been avoided?

I strongly recommend this book for the woman or man who respects good scholarship but prefers to read at a more popular level. The strong advocacy of interdependence should prompt changes in many Christian persons and some churches as well.

MENNONITES GATHER TO DISCUSS MALE-FEMALE INTERDEPENDENCE

Approximately 50 women and men attended the Male-Female Interdependence Workshop held on the Goshen College Campus, October 4-6. The workshop was designed to go beyond consciousness raising and to explore practical implications of a Christian view of masculine-feminine cooperation.

Some individuals see the essence of the relationship between men and women as one of conflict, rivalry, and a struggle for leadership, power, and domination. The participants in the workshop affirmed that the essence is rather one of mutuality, cooperation, and co-creativity. The group drew up axioms to express their assumptions on male-female interdependence. The eight axioms are listed on the following page.

1. God's Intention: At the beginning God created humankind as man and woman together. Both were made in the image of God with capacity for relationship. Both were equal before God and each other. Both were fully responsible to care for God's garden, to reproduce the human family, and to share life in mutual interdependence.

2. The Human Condition: The human tendency toward broken relationships between each other and their Creator is sin. This is the essence of the fall. Both man and woman sinned. Exploitation and domination of others, whether male or female, is continuing evidence of the sinful human condition.

3. Restoration in Christ: In Christ, God acted to restore broken relationships, bringing health and wholeness to the human family. Jesus invites all persons to experience forgiveness and join in fulfilling God's creative intent.

4. Family Relationships: Just as the biblical record presents various family patterns, we affirm the validity of a variety of family patterns in the modern world. The New Testament writers in particular encouraged interdependence between men and women. In line with scriptural intentions, decision-making concerning responsibilities, especially parenting, household tasks, and wage earning, should be shared equally and mutually in a home, according to individual gifts and changing circumstances rather than by traditional roles.

5. Division of Labor: We recognize the need for more flexibility in division of labor between males and females in home, church and society, with opportunity for both to develop individual skills and abilities. We urge persons to seek creative patterns of employment with mutual freedom for personal development and reduction of emotional strain.

6. Male/Female Traits: We sense that many traits traditionally assumed to be male or female are culturally imposed stereotypes. We recognize physiological differences and affirm the need for freedom for each individual to express valued human traits as each person is endowed and develops. Good feelings about one's sexuality are essential for honest, loving, open relationships.

7. Men and Women in Church Life: God's daughters and sons are called to become an integral part of the life and leadership of the Christian community. God demands that all members help each other to discern, develop and use and share the gifts the Spirit gives to the community for ministry and mission.

8. Human Sexuality: Human sexuality is an integral, pervasive aspect of the personality. When integrated into the total personality it finds its expression in warm, loving demonstrative acts, which include a spiritual dimension and are not restricted to the sex act. Human sexuality, one of God's great gifts to be received with joy and gratitude, provides opportunity to celebrate sexual difference as well as to affirm the beauty and richness of human oneness and interdependence. If properly respected and cherished, sexual relations are potentially fulfilling, but if abused they can be painful and degrading.

The Task Force welcomes responses and suggestions. Unless asked to keep correspondence confidential, we will assume that we have permission to print any remarks in the Task Force Reports. Correspondence should be sent to: Task Force on Women in Church and Society, MCC Peace Section, 21 S. 12th St., Akron, PA 17501.

REMAINING QUESTIONS

Participants in the Male-Female Interdependence Workshop were asked at the completion of the weekend to identify areas where they would like additional help. Do their responses echo some of your concerns? If you would care to express your opinion on any of these issues, the Task Force would be glad to print your reaction.

- Sexuality - How do we define/discover norms of sexual behavior? What about homosexuality? Does singleness imply celibacy?
- Church Institutions - How do we move them toward male/female interdependence? How do women avoid getting caught up in power struggles, typical in male hierarchies, yet push ahead for involvement in these structures?
- God Language - How do we speak of God in an asexual yet personal way?
- Parenting - How can we combine parenting with a career?
- Singleness - How can the church free people so they can feel comfortable about being single?
- Biblical Interpretation - How do we relate to persons who interpret scriptures so differently or are threatened by interdependence? How can we handle the rejection and alienation we experience in the church because of our position on women's liberation?

GOD IS NO RESPECTER OF PARSONS
or
IF THE APRON FITS, WEAR IT
by June Alliman Yoder

June Alliman Yoder presented a paper on the implications of interdependence and cooperation at the Goshen workshop. June is Director of Housing at Coe College, Cedar Rapids, Iowa and chairperson of Student Services Committee for the Mennonite Board of Missions. Printed below are excerpts from June's paper.

Parable of the Talents - Authority of Possibility

I would like to advocate a philosophy of liberation that I think has soundness and a great deal of exciting potential for all of us. Peggy Way, in an article called "An Authority of Possibility for Women in the Church," suggests an idea that has far reaching implications and great liberating power for human beings. First, let's look at Matt. 25:14-30, the parable of the talents. The significance of this parable is not that one servant was given more resources than another. For the master approves of the work of the servant who only had two talents. The problem is the servant who did nothing with his resources. And this is where I would like for us to plug into an authority of possibility. We are asked in this parable, or rather it is demanded of us in this parable, to produce to the extent that it is possible for us. Our authority for any goal or work or position is whether or not it is possible for us. If it is possible for us we are responsible to be whatever our abilities allow. This is not a "love Jesus and do what you want to" theory. Rather this is a demanding and stretching theory.

Limiting Authorities

To speak of the authority of possibilities is perhaps most easily accomplished by differentiating it from other authorities. Woman today operates basically under the

authority of social stereotyping. Women who do not are accused of "not knowing their place", or of being ignorant of "God's plan" for women, or they are simply dismissed as neurotic.

Another authority under which women operate in the church is the authority of church structure, or church history . . . no women should be ministers because we have no women ministers. No woman should be executive secretary of the Board of Missions because no woman ever was executive secretary for the Board of Missions. The authority of possibility, on the other hand, allies itself with any teaching on gifts. If you have the ability to become, you are required by divine command to become because it is possible.

This kind of idea is very major in principle and leaves, in my mind, Paul's teaching on whether women should cover their heads when worshipping lying somewhere in the dust. And it is not just for women. God commands us all to become the maximum our resources will allow and in near disgust He rejects less even though less may make perfectly logical sense to us. God will not tolerate the waste of His energy in us. Think of all the women who are "under-planned"; magnify that by the potential of the Mennonite church. Do I hear God pound his fist in a sickened rage?

Sharing in the Actualization of Others

Besides developing what is our "possible," we must share in the actualization of other persons' potential. Many of us, by our own egos, stereotypes, and ignorances make it impossible for those around us to experience the fullness of their possibilities. But, getting out of the way is not necessarily sufficient. When the opportunity is there, we must also demand the stretching of other spirits. To allow people around you to be less than maximum is to deny yourself of the total impact of these persons, consequently making you less also. So to facilitate the wholeness of not only yourself, but those around you as well, is to participate in one of the most profound and most exciting human activities.

Total humanness lives in the same Jesus who was salvation; and to allow yourself to be less than God calls you to be is to participate in your own condemnation. It is not enough to be the best of whatever you happen to be . . . success is not our measure. We must demand nothing less than the most it is possible for us to be. To become total persons we must be sensitive to the divine and master of the human within ourselves.

The practical implications of an authority of possibility are as unlimited as the human imagination . . . assuming God works through the human imagination. As a person grasps a sense of one's own worth, there is less necessity of being "like others" and more openness to experiencing new creations.

Faithfulness to One's Calling

The process of becoming a total human being is difficult and painful and takes time. I am not "anti" anyone being a housewife or a homemaker if she is creating in that position a life equal to her potential. There are women who spend their days being enablers for others. They work at preserving other people; and pulling from other people their capacities; and at giving inspiration and purpose to family and neighbors and community. This is fine; there must be enablers . . . but is this a calling? Is this discipleship? Or is it merely accepting society's role for your life and making the best of it? I do not place judgement! I merely ask housewives to be faithful to their high calling as persons, as total human beings and be sure that they are at their optimum too.

Housekeeping is the last unpaid, customary job, and if most women worked it would be professionalized too! The errands, the repairs, the appointment making, the book-keeping, the snack-making, the chauffeuring and other odd jobs which make women feel undervalued and disorganized, could all be turned into professionally run services. These new businesses would create more part-time, seasonal, odd-hour jobs, which would offer men and women wider choices about when they would--or could--work than the traditional 9-5 schedule. Odd hour schedules of work and study beget more odd hour jobs. Round the clock cafeteria people are needed to provide for round the clock factory workers; round the clock bus service for more round the clock cafeteria workers, etc.

Flexible schedules are increasing. More men and women do work that allows them to determine their own hours. Work of this kind encourages both men and women to try out new divisions of labor within families, new programs of work and study, or work and child-rearing, or work and retirement. Neither men nor women need to retire completely from work while their children are young if work is available when and where and in quantities they can choose.

Women must become freer to choose their work, and if they would take a good look at some of the chores which now keep them at home they may feel a greater urgency to be freed. What is the actual value of staying home all day to do two hours of cleaning? Women must stop allowing their resources to be wasted and rise to that which they are called. All people must stop wasting their resources, must stop making meaningless work their shackle.

Implications of Freedom

The implications of such freedom boggle the stereotyped mind. There will be women at home with children; there will be men at home with children; there will be men and women without children; there will be men secretaries and typists; there will be women secretaries and typists; there will be men teaching nursery classes; there will be women teaching kindergartens; there will be women executives and astronauts; there will be men cleaning houses and men crying; there will be women in power and men in power; and there will be women to preach salvation and men shall become their enablers. And there shall be human beings on the earth performing their high calling and enabling others to perform that to which they also are called.

If there is anyone unable to hear their call or unable to answer that call, they disobey God. And we who prohibit or inhibit anyone from their call do the work of evil.

We must stand with Paul and say: "Neither life nor death; nor powers nor principalities; nor things in the heavens above or the earth beneath," nor history, nor Mennonite doctrine, nor culture, nor the pervasiveness of the masculine consciousness shall keep me from the love of God who is Christ Jesus our Lord and who is the only One who can authorize my ministry. amen

EXAMINING MENNONITE THEOLOGICAL VIEWS

Ted Koontz, Acting Executive Secretary of the MCC Peace Section and a member of the Task Force, spoke at the Male-Female Interdependence Conference on some of the theological views which he believes "contribute to the male socialization process and to inequities and exploitative patterns which result." Some of the highlights of Ted's speech are printed on the following page.

1. INDIVIDUALISM: Our theology has had a strong individualistic core despite our peculiar emphasis as Mennonites on the church. We believe in adult baptism and the need for each individual to come to faith and to make a commitment. We believe that each one stands alone before God and must be saved by himself or herself. Theologically, I see nothing wrong with these views, but they tend to make us forget the church and to see our faith solely as a personal matter, making it impossible for us to confront one another. Stress on the worth of each person quickly becomes translated into the supreme worth of me and into the inflated egos of those who feel it is their prerogative to dominate the lives of others. It is at least in part because of this focus on the individual before God that we have been so blind to the questions of structural and power relationships.

2. PROTESTANT WORK ETHIC: One way of helping to alleviate the gnawing fear of damnation in Calvinism was to work hard. While that's not our theological belief, we've certainly bought the work ethic. We tend to define ourselves in relationship to our work. This kind of workaholic syndrome is damaging to the development of a central affirmation of who we are. It's also destructive to our home life because of the time and psychic energy which that kind of work requires.

3. CONCEPT OF AUTHORITY: Bill Gotthard and his scheme of hierarchical authority patterns are catching on like wild fire both outside and inside the Mennonite church. His chain of command model - God, man, woman, child - has appealed to many of our people. This structure rings true to much of the church's teaching and to the way the church makes or made decisions - from the top down.

4. RELATIONSHIP TO NATURAL ORDER: How much of our problem in developing mutual relationships with each other springs from our exploitative, manipulative relationships to the rest of creation? We have seen everything around us as something to be used, manipulated, shaped according to our needs, and then discarded. I think that our attitudes to each other and towards the rest of creation are related.

5 THEOLOGICAL STYLE: We have developed a way of doing theology which has seen truth as propositional and the Bible as an answer book to the tests of life. Our theology has been highly rationalistic and objective and perhaps, not coincidentally, virtually the sole domain of men. By the very way in which it is done, theology drives one away from the reality of one's own experience and toward some universal truth which we must only understand and believe in order to solve life's problems. This process by which we do theology further alienates us from ourselves and insulates us from opening our minds to insights from the experience of the unheard, for such insights do not fit into a theological system which sees truth as a package of presuppositions which are simply there for acceptance or rejection.

Ted makes some suggestions as to directions we could take within the theological realm that would move us toward equality, shared decision-making, and shared power. He emphasizes the need for (a) a discerning, caring fellowship to help us overcome the dangers of individualism; (b) a process for discerning and developing gifts; and (c) a re-examination of our way of theologizing. "Theology must be more related to experience. It must be seen as a growing, living statement of convictions coming out of our interaction with the Bible, our tradition, and the new realities which we confront in our day to day experience. . . .

"I think incarnation is the most potent theological weapon in the struggle against hierarchical authoritarianism that we have. In Jesus, God - who is the supreme authority - came to humanity in a relationship. The highest authority does not relate to us in a domineering manner but rather comes in the form of a servant."